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U.S., INTERNATIONAL LEADERS WORK TO COORDINATE TSUNAMI RELIEF

Disaster might lead to new plans for disaster mitigation

Leaders from more than 80 nations laid plans at a January 11 meeting in Geneva to support the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the 12 battered Indian Ocean nations struck by an earthquake-triggered tsunami.

The world governments have responded to the catastrophe with pledges of assistance that now exceed \$5 billion. The United Nations has already collected the almost \$1 billion that it predicted would be necessary to meet immediate needs. "This has never happened before," U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland said, according to published reports.

The United States has spent \$78 million of the \$350 million it has pledged to the relief effort, according to Administrator Andrew Natsios of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), who spoke to reporters at a briefing in Geneva. With more than 14,000 military personnel and scores of U.S. aircraft and ships taking part, the daily cost of the U.S. military contribution is estimated to be more than \$5 million a day, in addition to the \$350 million commitment, Natsios said.

Natsios emphasized the need for the international community to coordinate its efforts to bring swift rehabilitation and reconstruction to the battered communities and to the estimated 5 million people affected.

He also pointed out the need for long-term planning to restore economic viability in many stricken areas.

“In some of the smaller Indian islands, for example, and parts of the other coastlines of these countries, the agricultural land has been so salinated it will be unusable for one to two years,” Natsios said, “which means that for farmers, there needs to be some assistance in helping with livelihoods for that time period.”

The transcript of Administrator Natsios’s briefing is available on the U.S. Mission homepage at: <http://www.usmission.ch>.

GLOBAL SPACE COOPERATION HELPS TSUNAMI RELIEF EFFORT

International satellite data allow quick damage assessment

The recent tragedy that struck the coastlines of the Indian Ocean highlights the benefits of international cooperation in earth observation for managing disaster relief and suggests future opportunities for these activities.

According to a January 10 European Space Agency press release, immediately after the tsunami first struck in the Eastern Indian Ocean, three different agencies invoked the International Charter on Space and Major Disasters.

The charter was implemented in 2000 to ensure immediate access to earth observation data from participating space agencies by those dealing with major disasters. India activated the charter for access to data over its own territory; the U.N. Office of Outer Space Affairs activated the charter for Indonesia and Thailand; and the French Civil Protection Agency activated the charter for Sri Lanka.

Data have since been acquired from many satellite sources, including ESA’s Envisat, ERS and Proba satellites; the French SPOT series; Canada’s Radarsat; the U.S. Geological Survey’s Landsat and India’s IRS series. Very high-resolution data from the German Space Agency’s IKONOS and NASA’s Quickbird series have also been brought to bear on the relief effort.

All data have been given to relief agencies in the field.

The disaster has shown the need for improved data from floating buoys and bottom-pressure sensors such as those available in the Pacific Ocean and for improved communications between agencies, according to the ESA press release.

In 2003 the first summit of nations and organizations involved in earth observation was held in Washington. Summit participants launched the intergovernmental ad hoc Group on Earth Observations (GEO) to set up a 10-year implementation plan for the development of such a system of systems.

The full press release and graphics are available at http://www.esa.int/export/esaEO/SEMEEDQ3K3E_index_2.html

Satellite images of the Asian disaster are available at http://www.esa.int/esaEO/SEMPIB8873E_index_0.html

The International Charter on Space and Major Disasters is available at <http://www.disasterscharter.org/>

The Group on Earth Observations website is available at <http://earthobservations.org/default.asp>

U.S., EU AGREE TO NEGOTIATE ON ENDING AIRCRAFT SUBSIDIES

Bilateral talks to be held rather than pursuing dispute through WTO

By Tim Receveur
Washington File Staff Writer

The United States and the European Union (EU) agreed January 11 to hold bilateral talks to settle their dispute over subsidies to aircraft manufacturers Airbus and the Boeing Company rather than pursuing challenges against each other at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

“For the first time in this long-standing dispute, the U.S. and the EU have agreed that the goal should be to end subsidies,” said U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick.

According to a USTR press release, the negotiations will last approximately three months and will focus on ending subsidies to large civil aircraft “in a way that establishes fair market competition for all development and production.” The talks also will identify what types of aid the aircraft makers can still receive.

The final agreement, which would replace a 1992 bilateral agreement that permits subsidies for commercial aircraft development, will be enforced through transparency and strong dispute settlement procedures.

Zoellick said there is still much work to be done before the dispute is settled, but during the three-month negotiation there will be a “subsidies standstill” and a “litigation standstill.”

The “subsidies standstill” will not apply to current aid programs to Airbus and Boeing, but will prevent European governments from committing subsidies to their new Airbus A350, a competitor to Boeing’s planned 7E7 Dreamliner.

EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson said the agreement “creates a positive atmosphere for more work to strengthen the economic partnership between the EU and the US, which is vital for both of us.”

“With this agreement, the EU and US have confirmed their willingness to resolve the dispute which has arisen between them ... and to devote time and resources to doing so by negotiation rather than pursuing the dispute through WTO panels,” said Mandelson in his statement.

Following the announcement, a senior U.S. trade official said in a background briefing that the United States has always had the goal of resolving differences through diplomacy and negotiations, but that it is prepared to move forward with litigation in the WTO if necessary.

When asked if the negotiations could extend beyond the scheduled three-month time period, the official said that if an agreement is close to being finalized, then an extension is a possibility. However, he said that if “we’re stuck in the mud after three months, then the WTO process will need to be restarted.”

In October 2004, the United States announced it was taking the European Union to the WTO to stop subsidies to Airbus. The EU retaliated by announcing a counter-challenge over what it called “indirect” U.S. government subsidies to Boeing.

The text of U.S.-EU Agreement on Terms for Negotiation to End Subsidies for Large Civil Aircraft is available at:

<http://www.useu.be/Categories/AircraftSubsidies/Jan1105ZoellickAircraftSubsidies.html>

COORDINATED EFFORTS KEY TO FIGHTING TERRORISM, UNITED STATES SAYS

Officials outline to United Nations U.S. efforts to freeze terrorist funds

By Judy Aita

Washington File United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- Long-term, coordinated international efforts are extremely important in cutting the flow of funds to terrorist groups -- which now are becoming a loose collection of regional networks operating autonomously, U.S. officials say.

Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs E. Anthony Wayne and other officials met with members of the U.N. Security Council’s al-Qaida Sanctions Committee January 10. They discussed actions the United States has taken to freeze assets and to enact travel bans and arms embargoes on individuals and organizations placed on the U.N. sanctions list.

The officials urged U.N. member states to seek help in strengthening their sanctions regimes, setting up procedures, or enacting national laws on terrorist financing if they need such help. They also called on governments to concentrate on providing additional information on the more than 300 names currently on the sanctions list to help the private sector make the correct identification before freezing assets.

After the closed-door session, Wayne said, “You can have the best intelligence in the world, but if you don’t have the cooperation of other governments where individuals are operating, you have a very hard time in stopping them from operating and transferring money.”

“One of the very important effects of the U.N. resolutions is the obligation it has on governments around the world to cooperate,” Wayne said. “We’ve found that the

vast, vast majority of governments are very sincere in wanting to apply those requirements.”

Wayne told the committee, “[T]he United States is fully committed to implementing the sanctions imposed by the Security Council under Resolution 1267. We view these measures as a critical component in the collective effort of nations to defeat the threat to international peace and security posed by terrorists linked to al-Qaida and the Taliban.”

Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crime Juan Zarate added that the information “shows us that the international efforts have been effective and the work of this committee is important and part of that effectiveness.”

Approximately \$147 million in terrorist-related assets worldwide have been frozen based on this process, Zarate said.

“We know that the designation process not only freezes assets but it cuts off channels of funding for al-Qaida. It deters those who would otherwise support al-Qaida and other like-minded terrorist groups. It notifies those who are not otherwise witting of their support that they are supporting an organization -- we’ve seen that very clearly in the case of non-profit organizations that have been abused by al-Qaida,” he said.

The two officials said that at the start of a new year the committee should hear how important and successful the process has been. They urged other governments to meet with the committee to share information on their efforts to freeze terrorist assets, as well as their efforts to identify other individuals and organizations that are supporting al-Qaida, the Taliban and other terrorist organizations.

It is not just a matter of exactly how much is kept from the terrorists, but also a matter of identifying others and cutting them off as well, Zarate said.

“It is not the amount of dollars you freeze on the day of the designation; it is, instead, financially isolating those who are supporting al-Qaida. We think that is the relevance and real importance of this target financial regime. We think it has been effective,” the Treasury official said.

Nevertheless, with the success of the system has come a new problem, Zarate said. Terrorist groups such as al-Qaida are now resorting to more informal ways of moving and raising money, such as using cash couriers

to transfer money, and the committee must now begin to discuss ways to tackle those issues, he said.

The two officials discussed how the White House; the U.S. departments of Treasury, Justice, State, and Homeland Security; and law enforcement and intelligence communities work closely together at every stage of the process to identify, trace and pursue terrorists and their supporters and take actions under various laws to gather information and eventually freeze assets.

For example, the National Counterterrorism Center maintains a central classified U.S. government database of known and suspected international terrorists from which individuals are nominated for the U.N. sanctions list. The Terrorist Screening Center, administered by the FBI, reviews nominations and ensures that the identifying information meets the standards for inclusion. The State Department’s Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs and its regional bureaus lead the effort to coordinate bilaterally and multilaterally with other governments.

All the activity involved in identifying financing sources and blocking assets requires a sustained political will, a substantial commitment of resources, accountability for administering and enforcing sanctions, and constant and close communication across the U.S. government and with the private sectors, Zarate said.

Wayne also warned the committee that “there are growing indications that al-Qaida’s ideology is spreading well beyond the Middle East.”

Due to the global coalition against terrorism, al-Qaida, Osama bin Laden, and the Taliban have suffered significant losses, he said. Key al-Qaida leaders in all operations areas -- logistics, planning, finance and training -- have been killed or captured. The organizations’ safe havens have been lost and finances squeezed. “But al-Qaida is certainly not defeated,” Wayne said. “We are still at war.”

The organization has been transformed into a loose collection of regional networks that operate more autonomously. Islamic extremist groups like Ansar al-Islam and the Zarqawi network have picked up al-Qaida’s standard and thousands of extremists around the world who have fought in conflicts in Kosovo, Kashmir, and elsewhere continue to be a ready source of recruits, the State Department official said.

U.S. TEAM TO DEVELOP PORTABLE INFECTIOUS DISEASE DETECTOR

Device intended to detect the presence of HIV, measles, ricin, anthrax

A portable device similar to home pregnancy tests that can quickly detect the presence of infectious diseases -- including HIV/AIDS, measles and biological agents such as ricin and anthrax -- is the object of a new university-industry research project.

According to a January 10 Vanderbilt University press release, Vanderbilt's Institute for Integrative Biosystems Research and Education (VIIBRE) and Pria Diagnostics, a California company that specializes in miniaturized medical diagnostics, will collaborate to develop the device.

The team developed two basic technologies: special electrodes that can measure concentrations of chemicals that cells consume and excrete in extremely small volumes; and the use of fluids flowing through microscopic channels to reliably move and manipulate small numbers of cells.

"We are already making rapid progress on prototyping portable instruments for clinical diagnosis and bio-defense," said VIIBRE Director John Wikswo, Vanderbilt professor of biomedical engineering, physiology and physics. The U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects agency provided funding for the work.

"We are developing a device that we hope will allow medical professionals and HIV patients to manage their disease in a way that is similar to how diabetes patients can monitor their condition, since the introduction of home blood-glucose detectors," said Pria Chief Technology Officer Jason Pyle.

The goal is to produce the first portable HIV monitor within two years. The team also plans to develop screening systems that can determine the biological activity of large numbers of compounds very quickly to have a major impact on the drug discovery process.

For more news about Vanderbilt research, visit Exploration, Vanderbilt's online research magazine, at <http://www.exploration.vanderbilt.edu>

